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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 004143

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SUBJECT: KENYAN GOVERNMENT OFFERS CARROTS FOR BANANAS

REF: NAIROBI 4128

Classified By: Political Counselor Michael J. Fitzpatrick. Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ahead of Kenya's November 21 constitutional referendum, the Government has begun offering various constituency groups a variety of enticements, implicitly to win their "Yes" or banana, vote. The offers so far include a number of controversial land ownership concessions, pay increases for local officials, and development projects. The deals have not necessarily achieved the desired effect, with the Maasai notably not reversing their "no" stand despite regaining control of Amboseli National Park. The patronage offers have the "No" (or orange) campaigners crying foul and highlight the government's willingness to use any resources at its disposal to pursue its pro-draft constitution agenda. END SUMMARY.

"Referendum Giveaway"

12. (U) On September 29, the Kenyan Government announced its plan to designate Amboseli National Park as a national reserve, thus localizing its administration and directing the sanctuary's revenues into the immediate (mostly Maasai) community. (NOTE: Amboseli is one of Kenya's most revered parks, where all of "the Big Five" game animals can be found against the backdrop of Tanzania's Mt. Kilimanjaro.) The announcement came days before the largest-ever Maasai gathering at Narok (reftel), during which the Suswa Declaration formalized the community's opposition to the draft constitution. The Maasai are concerned that the proposed constitution, if enacted, will place all national parks and reserves in government hands, making the Amboseli offer an empty one. An editorial in "The Nation" was sharply critical of the GOK's Amboseli plan, calling it "a desperate attempt to bribe the Maasai." The government, however, denies it is anything of the sort.

13. (U) In another land offer, President Kibaki announced October 3 that the thousands of (mostly Kalenjin or Kipsigis) residents of the protected Mau Forest in Narok -- and who were forcibly evicted in January -- would now be allowed to return to their farms or otherwise be resettled on public lands in the Forest. No timeframe, however, was specified for implementation. Community leaders charged the government was attempting to "blackmail" voters with promises related to the ever-sensitive land issues. Additionally, the government abruptly revoked a regulation prohibiting landowners from dividing their plots into parcels smaller than one hectare (two and one half acres), an important concession to the large number of Kenyans who distribute their land among sons.

Open Season on Government Generosity

14. (U) In what may be interpreted as another attempt to woo Maasai voters to the "Yes" side, the GOK released 13 herders who had been in custody for over a year for allegedly demonstrating against settler ranches on Maasai land. More transparently, on October 3, the government announced pay raises for hundreds of local government officials. Minister for Local Government Musikari Kombo reportedly claimed that the salary increase was in the works before the referendum process, but a representative of the officials was quoted as having said that "we are still orange (i.e., "No") supporters until our demands are met."

15. (U) The government has also recently announced a number of ambitious development plans, including a pledge of 880 million Kenyan shillings (approximately USD 12 billion) for slum improvement (over the next 15 years). Additionally, during his trip to Isiolo in late September, President Kibaki offered the district six new schools, a livestock purchase program, and renovation of the local airport.

Comment: More Than Free Fruit

16. (C) Despite the government's claim of merely coincidental timing, its use of enticements to win "Yes" votes is rather transparent. The Maasai, for example, have seen through this

political ploy. Moreover, the GOK has set an expensive, and perhaps unsustainable, precedent that has signaled to some observers its desperation to win approval for the Wako draft constitution. While the use of official cars and helicopters for campaigning is perhaps the most obvious exploitation of public resources for referendum campaigning, it is perhaps not the most significant. By doling out major financial favors, the government is relying on its fiscal might to bring in banana votes. One group that has yet to see any benefit to opposing the draft is teachers. But with seven weeks to go, there is still time.

BELLAMY